

II

U. S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE  
FRANCO-VIET MINH WAR

1950 - 1954

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# UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

## 1945 - 1967-

### II

U. S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE

FRANCO-VIET MINH WAR

1950 - 1954

1. Robert Sharlen, The Lost Revolution (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 58.
2. Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1945 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 245.
3. Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled (New York: Praeger, 1967, 2 vols.), II, 706-707.
4. Ibid., 712.
5. Ibid., 724; Sharlen, op. cit., 63.
6. Ibid., 64. Cf., Ellen Hammer, "Genesis of the First Indochinese War, 1946-1950," in Marvin E. Gettleman, ed., Viet Nam (New York: Fawcett, 1965), 81.
7. Ibid., 82.
8. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina, op. cit., 246. General Revers' "Secret" report was widely publicized in 1950, and occasioned a political scandal in Paris known as "the affair of the generals."
9. Sharlen, op. cit., 64-65.
10. Ibid., 78.
11. Ibid., 79.
12. Ibid., 65.
13. Ibid., 76.
14. Hammer, op. cit., 280.
15. Ibid., 278.
16. Buttinger, op. cit., II, 722-723; Sharlen, op. cit., 60, 84.
17. Hammer, op. cit., 269-270.
18. Paris 837 to State, February 22, 1950.
19. Memorandum for the President from the Secretary of Defense, dated 6 March 1950 (TOP SECRET).

20. Charles Wolf, Jr., Foreign Aid: Theory and Practice in Southern Asia, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 82. The quotation is from an Economic Cooperation Administration Report to Congress of June 30, 1950.
21. Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from the JCS, April 5, 1950, "Strategic Assessment of Southeast Asia," (TOP SECRET).
22. State to London 2049, May 3, 1950 (TOP SECRET).
23. Department of State, Bulletin, May 22, 1950.
24. White House Press Release, June 27, 1950.
25. Quoted in Hammer, op. cit., 271.
26. Shaplen, op. cit., 80.
27. Ibid., 81.
28. Ibid., 87.
29. Ibid., 81-82.
30. Bernard B. Fall, Hell in a Very Small Place (New York: Lippencott, 1967), 479 ff.
31. Shaplen, op. cit., 81.
32. Hammer, op. cit., 283.
33. Ibid., 299-300.
34. Ibid., 300.
35. Ibid.
36. Shaplen, op. cit., 78.
37. Ibid.
38. George McTurnan Kahin and John W. Lewis, The United States in Vietnam (New York: Dial Press, 1967), 33.
39. Shaplen, op. cit., 94.
40. Kahin and Lewis, loc.cit.

41. Shaplen, op. cit., 86; 90.
42. Ibid., 90, 87.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 88-89.
45. Ibid., 66, 84-85.
46. Ibid., 91.

1. NSC 124, A Report to the National Security Council on U.S. Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Communist Aggression in Southeast Asia, February 13, 1952 (TOP SECRET).
2. A Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary on Basic National Security Policy (NSC 162/P), October 30, 1953 (TOP SECRET - SENSITIVE). The Report was adopted October 29, 1953, at the 168th Council meeting.
3. Memorandum from Col. George W. Coolidge (GS, Acting Chief, Plans Division) to Defense Member, NSC Planning Board (att: Col Bonesteel), December 8, 1953 (TOP SECRET).
4. Anderson to Wilson, January 6, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
5. Davis letter to Bonesteel, January 5, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
6. NSC Planning Board, A Report to the National Security Council on U.S. Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia (NSC 177), December 30, 1953 (TOP SECRET).
7. Summary and Comments of the 179th NSC meeting, January 8, 1954.
8. See memorandum from Lt. Gen. F. F. Everest (USAF), for the JCS, to the Secretary of Defense, January 15, 1954 (TOP SECRET); also, the comments of Radford as reported in a memorandum from Capt. G. W. Anderson, Jr. (USN) to Lt. Gen. Jean Valluy, French Military Mission to the U.S., January 30, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
9. United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia (NSC 5405), January 16, 1954 (TOP SECRET). NSC 5405 differs from NSC 177 in only two respects: a paragraph on the U.S. response to a Chinese move into Thailand, and a deleted reference in the earlier paper to France's decline as a world power, with repercussions on her position in Europe and North Africa, if Indochina should be lost.
10. The Annex was recirculated on March 29, 1954.
11. Army Position on NSC Action No. 1074A, undated (early April 1954).
12. Department of State Press Release No. 165, March 29, 1954.
13. Draft: Special Committee Report on Southeast Asia - Part II, April 2, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
14. See the undated State Department position paper apparently written between April 2 and 5, just prior to the French request made through

Dillon, for direct U.S. air intervention at Dien Bien Phu. The State paper, with minor changes, became NSC Action No. 10744, April 5, 1954 (TOP SECRET).

15. Summary and Content of 192nd NSC Meeting, April 6, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
16. Secretary Wilson memorandum to the JCS and the Army, Navy, and Air Force Secretaries, April 15, 1954 (TOP SECRET).

# FOOTNOTES

1. Ho Chi Minh, Selected Works, Vol. III, (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), pp. 408-9; Peter V. Curi, ed. Documents on American Foreign Relations 1953, (New York, 1954), p. 162; both as cited in Melvin Gurtov, The First Vietnam Crisis (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 18, 48, 171-2.
2. Telegram from Theodore C. Achilles, deputy chief of mission, Paris, to Dulles No. 2110, November 30, 1953 (CONFIDENTIAL).
3. Dulles telegram No. 180 to American Embassy - Paris, July 15, 1953, (TOP SECRET) following bilateral talks of July 12. This position was reaffirmed in NSC 177 of December 30, 1953.
4. See Dulles' September 2, 1953, address to the American Legion, in which he said: "We want peace in Indochina, as well as in Korea. The political conference about to be held relates in the first instance to Korea. But growing out of that conference could come, if Red China wants it, an end of aggression and restoration of peace in Indochina. The United States would welcome such a development." Cf. a French memorandum, undated, following tripartite (U.S.-U.K.-France) talks in Washington in July 1953. Here, it is urged that the Chinese representative to the Korean political conference be sounded out on China's intentions toward Indochina. China must be made to conclude "that her best interest is to cut down her support of the Viet Minh, in order to enjoy the benefits which she might expect to derive from a prolonged or final cessation of hostilities on the 38th parallel." (CONFIDENTIAL).
5. New York Herald Tribune, February 19, 1954, p. 3, as quoted in Gurtov, op.cit., p. 76.
6. Department of State, U.S. Policy on Indochina, 1945 - May 8, 1954, Research Project No. 370, July 1955, p. 11.
7. According to the Defense Department, Chinese aid was constant at 1000 tons a month from March 1953 to March 1954, with the exceptions of June 1953 (2200 tons) and March 1954 (2500 tons). See memorandum of Robert H. B. Wade (OASD) to Brig. Gen. Bonesteel (OASD, ISA), April 13, 1954 (SECRET).
8. Dulles reminded Ely that once the U.S. committed any of its armed forces to the war, we would want to have a success, which in turn meant "a greater degree of partnership than had prevailed up to present time, notably in relation to independence for Associated States and training of indigenous forces." Dulles priority telegram to American Embassy - Paris (eyes only for Ambassador Dillon) No. 3277, March 23, 1954 (TOP SECRET).



9. Paul Ely, Mémoires: L'Indochina dans la Tourmente, (Paris: Plon, 1964), p. 64.
10. Ibid., pp. 76-77, 82-83; Jean Laconture and Philippe Devillers, La Fin d'une Guerre (Paris, 1960); p. 73; Joseph Laniel, Le Drame Indochinois: De Dien Bien Phu au Pari de Geneve, (Paris: Plon, 1957), p. 88. Laniel writes of a raid by 300 Philippine-based fighter bombers.
11. Melvin Gurtov, The First Vietnam Crisis (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 79-80; 188; 217.
12. John Foster Dulles, "The Threat of a Red Asia," Department of State Bulletin, April 12, 1954.
13. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change, 1953-1956 (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1963), pp. 346-7.
14. Memorandum by Bonbright (EUR) of conversation among Dulles, Ambassador Spender (Australia) and Ambassador Munro (New Zealand), April 4; memorandum by Bonbright of conversation between Dulles and Munro, April 6, 1954, TOP SECRET - as given in Department of State Research Project No. 370, op.cit., p. 16.
15. Anthony Eden, Full Circle (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), p. 104.
16. Telegram 3729 from American Embassy, Paris, April 5, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
17. Telegram 3710 from American Embassy, Paris, April 5, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
18. The account of the April 3 meeting is taken primarily from Gurtov, op.cit., pp. 94-96. Gurtov's book draws heavily from Chalmers M. Roberts, "The Day We Didn't Go to War," The Reporter, XI, September 14, 1954. Corroborative material is to be found in John Robinson Beal, John Foster Dulles, (New York, 1957), pp. 207-8; Eisenhower, Mandate for Change, pp. 346-7.
19. Gurtov, op.cit., pp. 96-97.
20. Deptel 689 to American Embassy, London, August 3, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
21. Deptel 3482 to American Embassy, Paris, April 5, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
22. Sherman Adams, Firsthand Report: The Story of the Eisenhower Administration, (New York: Harper and Bros., 1961), p. 121.
23. Eisenhower, op.cit., p. 347.
24. Eden, op.cit., pp. 106-7.

25. Dulles "eyes only" telegram DULTE 9 from Geneva for Smith, Dillon, and Aldrich, April 26, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
26. "View of British JIC [Joint Intelligence Center] on Indochina," April 16, 1954 (SECRET). JIC estimated that the Chinese could deploy about 128,000 men in three field armies to the Indochina frontier within twelve days. In the air, the CCAF would probably provide "only minimum air support." JIC calculated, inasmuch as the Chinese would doubtless want to reserve their air power for defense of the mainland.
27. See Aldrich priority cable "eyes only" No. 4382 from London to Dulles, April 6, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
28. See Dulles "eyes only" cable NIACT 5177 and 3478 (TOP SECRET), written after a conversation with the British Ambassador, Sir Roger Makins, on April 2, 1954.
29. Dulles telegram No. 5090 to American Embassy - London, April 1, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
30. Dulles "eyes only" telegram from Geneva DULTE 5 for Smith, April 25, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
31. In U.S. Ambassador Aldrich's "eyes only" telegram No. 4725 from London for Dulles, Smith, Wilson, and JCS, April 26, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
32. Memorandum by MacArthur of conversation with Prime Minister Laniel, in Paris, April 13; memorandum of conversation among Dulles, Ambassador Dillon, MacArthur, Lt. Col. Walter, Laniel, and Foreign Minister Bidault, in Paris, April 14; memorandum by MacArthur of conversation between Dulles and Bidault, April 14; TOP SECRET, from Paris, tel. 3888, April 14, 1954, SECRET. In State Department Research Project No. 370, July, 1955.
33. Memorandum by Merchant (EUR) of conversations between Ambassador Makins and Smith (U) and between Makins and Dulles, April 18, 1954, SECRET; from Paris, tel. DULTE 3, April 22, 1954, TOP SECRET. In Department of State Research Project No. 370, July, 1955. Hereafter cited as "R.P. No. 370."
34. Eden, op.cit., pp. 109-111.
35. Eisenhower, op.cit., p. 353.
36. From Paris, tels. DULTE 2, April 22, and DULTE 15, April 24, 1954, TOP SECRET, R.P. No. 370.
37. From Paris, tel. 3972, April 21, 1954, SECRET. R.P. No. 370.

38. From Paris, tel. DULTE 2, April 22, 1954, TOP SECRET. (See also from Saigon tel. 2096, April 23, 1954, and tel. 2098, April 24, 1954, both TOP SECRET.) From Saigon the Chief of the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group reported that the French Commander lacked the ability to wage war on a scale necessary to win, and he suggested that the United States assume operational and training control in southern Indochina. From Saigon, Army tel. MG 1122 A 220400Z and tel. 2072, April 22, 1954, SECRET and TOP SECRET, respectively. R. P. No. 370.
39. Memorandum by MacArthur of conversation among Laniel, Vidal, Bougenot, and himself, in Paris, April 23, 1954, TOP SECRET; from Paris, tel. DULTE 9, April 26, 1954, TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
40. From Paris, tels. DULTE 7 and 10, April 23; DULTE 15, April 24, 1954, all TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
41. From Paris, tels. DULTE 2, April 22; DULTE 7 and 10, April 23; DULTE 17, April 24; memorandum by MacArthur of conversation among Laniel, Vidal, Bougenot, and himself, in Paris, April 23, 1954, all TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
42. From Paris, tel. DULTE 17, April 24, 1954, TOP SECRET; to Geneva, tel. TEDUL 4, April 25, 1954, TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
43. From Paris, tel. DULTE 13, April 24; to Paris, tel. TEDUL 8, April 24, 1954, TOP SECRET. For comments on American policy by Secretary Dulles at a background meeting with correspondents in Geneva on April 25, see from Geneva tel. SECTO 6, April 25, 1954, CONFIDENTIAL. R.P. No. 370.
44. From Paris, tel. 4058, April 25; from Geneva, tel. DULTE 8, April 26, 1954, TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
45. From Paris, tels. DULTE 3, April 22; DULTE 10, April 23, DULTE 18, April 24, 1954, all TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
46. From Paris, tel. DULTE 15, April 24, 1954, TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
47. From Paris, tel. DULTE 17, April 24; from Geneva, tel. DULTE 7, April 26, 1954, both TOP SECRET. House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, Fifth Series, April 27, 1954, p. 1456. R.P. No. 370.
48. From London, tel. 4750, April 27, 1954, SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
49. From Paris, tel. DULTE 10, April 23, 1954, TOP SECRET. Concerning the reactions of Under Secretary Smith and Secretary Dulles to Eden's proposal, see Geneva, tel. TEDUL 2, April 24, 1954, TOP SECRET, and from Geneva, tel. DULTE 25, April 29, 1954, TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.

50. From Geneva, tels. DULTE 7, April 26; DULTE 30, and DULTE 34, April 30, 1954, all TOP SECRET. Secretary Dulles told Mr. Eden that the initial nucleus in the proposed Southeast Asian defense plan should comprise Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and the Associated States of Indochina (from Geneva, tel. DULTE 33, April 30, 1954, TOP SECRET). R.P. No. 370.
51. Memorandum by McBride (WE) of conversation among Dulles, Smith (U), R. G. Casey (Australia), and T. C. Webb (New Zealand), in Geneva, May 2, 1954, SECRET; see also from Canberra, tel. 257, May 7, 1954, SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
52. To Geneva, tel. TEDUL 16, April 28, 1954 (containing summary by Robert Cutler of the White House staff, of principal points made by the President), TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
53. For an account of Admiral Radford's conversations with British leaders in London, see from London, tel. 4725, April 26, 1954, TOP SECRET; to Geneva, tel. JCS 960578, April 27, 1954, TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
54. To Geneva, tel. TEDUL 16, April 28, 1954, TOP SECRET; memorandum by Cutler (White House staff) of conversation in the President's office among the President, General Smith (U), Admiral Radford, and himself, April 28, 1954, TOP SECRET. R.P. No. 370.
55. From Geneva, tel. DULTE 2, April 25, 1954, TOP SECRET; from Paris, tel. 4266, May 7, 1954, CONFIDENTIAL; White House Press Releases (2), May 7, 1954.
56. Department of State Press Release No. 4, May 11, 1954.
57. For the official conference transcript see Department of State Bulletin, XXX, No. 778, May 24, 1954.